

10 Tips for Teaching Students to Read Closely

Always Set a Purpose for Reading

Help students dig deeper by setting a specific purpose for rereading. That purpose might be to uncover a concept or theme, or to analyze how an author uses a literary element or creates tone. Giving students something specific to focus on requires that they return to the text and really focus.

Be a Close Reader Yourself

To teach students how to think critically, you need to consider the thinking processes that readers use. Step back and take yourself through the process with a variety of texts in order to analyze the skills you'll be modeling for your students. As you teach close reading, it's important that you know the text backwards and forwards. Every time you raise an issue or ask a question for discussion (e.g. "How do we know that Fern feels responsible?"), you'll know how to help your students find the textual evidence and where it's located in the text.

Closely Read Across the Curriculum

Don't forget that close reading can happen in science, social studies, math, and other subjects. Students can spend time delving into charts and graphs in science, discussing a math concept, or working to truly understand the various interpretations of a speech in social studies.

Design Intentional Scaffolds

Promoting a culture of high expectations for all students is a fundamental aspect of the new standards. To promote successful skill acquisition, some students will need temporary supports to help them learn how and when to read closely. Gradual and planful removal of these scaffolds occurs as students become more successful and independent with the task.

Diversify The Text and How Students Interact with It

Even if students aren't able to closely read independently, they can still apply critical thinking skills to a passage. Students may listen to an oral reading of the text, work in a small group with teacher support, or work with a partner to reread a text and prepare for discussion. Consider using different types of text, including picture books, short stories, poems, images, and video clips.

Let Them Make Mistakes

Allow students to grapple with ideas and to experience divergent thinking. Regularly encountering challenges and mistakes builds a growth mindset and develops intellectual resilience. When students encounter difficulties, don't immediately jump in to rescue. Instead, ask questions that will help them to think through the problem, identify, and choose a course of action for moving forward. We all can learn a lot from making mistakes, pushing ourselves out of our comfort zone, and taking risks to try new things.

Model it

Give your students a glimpse into your brain to witness your thinking process. Spend time modeling how to interact with the text, how to question, how to solve unknown words and phrases. Modeling doesn't necessarily have to be a first step in a lesson. It is often most effective when it is specifically responsive to students' needs, rather than a generic "prequel." Use language to name and notice the thinking, and do the same to make students' thinking visible. This is especially important when praising and giving feedback.

Select Texts that Provide “Stretch”

The purpose for having students learn to read closely is to develop their ability to read increasingly complex texts over time. As you choose texts to use with your students, think about your purpose behind each text. Look for stories or articles that raise authentic questions and could be interpreted differently depending on each student’s background knowledge or prior reading. If you’re working with a novel, focus on a section that lends itself to ambiguity and interpretation.

Teach Students to Look for the Evidence

Think about higher order questions will guide students into supporting their thinking with evidence that is both literal and inferential. When students read this way, like detectives, they learn to extract information from texts and grasp how it is conveyed, as well as analyze and connect sources of information. Push students to go beyond recounting facts and plot points by asking probing questions such as “How do you know?” and “What makes you think that?”

Use Student Questions to Drive Discussion

Our questions drive us as learners. Develop close reading lessons by compiling student and teacher questions that come from the text. Together, discuss the questions and decide which are the most interesting and worthy of further exploration. This is a great way to help students learn to ask higher-order questions and to write good thesis statements.